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# The Commons And The New Age of Laissez Faire

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# The Commons And The New Age of *Laissez Faire*<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

We are currently knee-deep in a rather peculiar restoration in American public life – one that has tremendous implications for the future of nonprofit organization, voluntary action and philanthropy. As recently as two decades ago “nineteenth century individualism” and the doctrine of *laissez faire* were presented in our public schools and colleges as anachronisms – simplistic foibles from an innocent past transcended by the inevitable advance of progress and the growth of society. (Reisman, 19XX) Many social scientists – probably including many futurists – would still adhere to this view.

Yet, here we are on the verge of not only a new century but also a new millennium, and, *laissez faire*, the doctrine of noninterference in the affairs of others, which finds expression in ideas of individual entrepreneurship, rugged individualism, the sanctification of capital, the monism of the marketplace and the doctrine that freedom is primarily an economic, not a political, concern has once again become the *de facto* vocabulary of a broad segment of American public life. One of the principal characteristics of the emergence of this new *laissez faire* is the way in which it has moved nonprofit organizations, voluntary action, philanthropy and other community institutions off the public agenda and out of public rhetoric.

This shift in public discourse has occurred at the end of the Cold War when the United States has emerged as the dominant superpower in the new world order, so that what is said (and not said) in American public debate is heard around the world. Even those who disagree strongly with this new resurgence of individualism are forced to take note.

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I'm not here today to debate the pros and cons of the return of *laissez faire* to the American public agenda or to promote any alternative visions of the welfare state, big government, collectivism or communitarianism. My only concern is to point out that *laissez faire* visions of the future being promoted today are dangerously limited in at least one important respect: They omit any reference to nonprofit organizations, voluntary action or philanthropy (along with sustaining reference groups like family and support and friendship groups) as operative parts of the future. Instead, they offer an altogether familiar bi-polar social universe from the past composed of "the state" (a.k.a. "big government") and "the individual" (which appears to include such fictive "individuals" as Fortune 500 corporations). In some alternate versions, this new *laissez-faire* may also find a place for "state and local government" in contrast to the "big" (that is, federal) government.

The one thing new *laissez faire* rhetoric seldom does is find any place for broader visions of civil society, and in particular, nonprofit organizations, voluntary action, or philanthropy which have been such important parts of the American past.

## **Two Visions of Democracy**

There have in fact always been not one, but two distinct, visions of democracy and the open society active in the American context, each with many variations: On the one hand, there is the liberal individualist vision which draws its sustenance largely from Hobbes and Locke and the English utilitarians. In an important subset of this liberal individualism running from Benthamite utilitarianism through the Austrian School, economic freedoms (entrepreneurship and free trade) are treated as the ultimate measures of a free world.

On the other hand, sources as diverse as Alexis deTocqueville, Frank Lloyd Wright and John Dewey have accentuated more pluralistic and communitarian visions of free societies. Tocqueville has long been recognized for his insights on the role of voluntary associations as intermediate institutions between the coercive powers of the state and the freedom of the individual citizen. A half-century ago, Wright's Broadacre City and Usonian House emerged as profoundly important influences on the built

environment of contemporary urbanism. (Rosenbaum, 1993; Sergeant, 1976) Much of what is disparaged as “liberal” in contemporary political rhetoric bears some connection to the pragmatic liberalism first articulated by Dewey.

The resurgent rhetoric of *laissez faire* individualism in American public life has driven discussion of such “collective” or “cooperative” concerns as nonprofit organizations, voluntary action and philanthropy completely out of the realm of public issues, and resulted in the spread of a highly skewed conception of communities as consisting only of home, work and school. Such familiar institutions as churches, synagogues and mosques, neighborhoods, clubs, societies, organizations, social service, fund raising, volunteering, are omitted from new *laissez faire* discussions of community, which is treated solely in terms of work, home and school.

This is not primarily a directional, or politically motivated, critique: Indeed, the last major public image of this sort may well have been George Bush’s “Thousand Points of Light” which emphasized volunteering. Conservative and liberal nonprofit institutions, voluntary associations, philanthropic organizations and political organizations are equally absent from the new *laissez faire* visions of the future: the Heritage Foundation as well as the Brookings Institution; the Christian Coalition and the National Council of Churches; the Republican Party as well as the Democrats. What is important here is not any ideological bias but a pervasive silence.

## **We-Groups**

My critique **is** directional, however, in that I am largely uninterested in the nonprofit benefactories – those tax-exempt nonprofit service corporations – that increasingly draw the main body of attention by those interested in “the third sector”. My principal interest is, instead, in the commons – those clubs, congregations, membership organizations, self-help and support groups, peer- and friendship groups and other “we-groups”. Such entities, characterized by uncoerced participation, shared purposes and resources, mutuality and indigenous standards of fairness are,

in my view, fundamental expressions of human plurality and basic to human freedom. (Lohmann, 1992)

I do not intend to suggest that the new *laissez faire* rhetoric of today means that President Clinton or Speaker Gingrich, or Ross Perow or any of the manifold other American public figures from whom we regularly hear it are ignorant of these commons or believe there will be no nonprofit organizations, voluntary action or philanthropy in our future. No political figure, even an exceptionally wealthy one, can expect to carry on for long without volunteers and donations!

What is truly remarkable, however, is the distinctive way in which the new *laissez faire* is characterized by an impoverished public rhetoric in which community institutions other than home, school and work simply do not appear. There is remarkably little mention in public discourse today of clubs and associations, congregations, museums, theaters, social services, civic groups, foundations or any of the manifold other nonprofit organizations, voluntary associations and philanthropic institutions which are regarded around the world as one of the distinctive marks of American Civilization.

Yet, the new *laissez fair* has banished them from public discourse. Contemporary expressions of the influence of the new *laissez faire* on a diminished sense of the commons and common goods are easy to locate. Indeed, it is the wide and rapid spread of this feeble vision of the future American community which is one of its most interesting features. It can be found (or rather, not found) in just about any contemporary public expression: in such diverse places as the Republican Party's Contract for America, (Gingrich, 1995); a speech by the Director of the Futurist society in Michigan (Glazer, 1995); Clinton Administration proposals for the National Information Infrastructure; an interesting and farsighted economic development document entitled Blue Print for a 21st Century Community, (Joint Venture: Silicon Valley , 1994) recent presentations to this society and even works by the head of the communitarian political movement in the U.S. (Etzioni, 1993)

## **“Contract For America”**

It is hard to remember a single document drafted by elected public officials which has had more immediate and dramatic impact than the Republican *Contract for America* in 1994. In a cynical age when “political” writing by public officials consists mostly of leaked staff memos, ghost-written campaign biographies fine tuned to the issues of a particular campaign and memoirs emphasizing the “kiss and tell” peccadilloes of the subject, it is hard to think of another statement of political objectives and intentions quite like the *Contract*. For this reason alone, its vision of the commons should be of interest – if it contained one.

The text of the *Contract* contains no direct or indirect references to political parties, citizenship or community action, civil society and it certainly contains no references to community or commonwealth or the larger body of apolitical nonprofit organizations, voluntary associations or philanthropic institutions (not even that marvel of modern political philanthropy, the political action committee, or PAC). The reasons for such an obvious omission are open to several possible interpretations. Fortunately, we may be able to get some help in interpreting it from one of the authors.

In the current issue of *The Futurist*, one of the leading architects of the Contract, House Speaker Newt Gingrich, articulates his vision of “an opportunity society” which would, he suggests, represent a “renewed American Civilization” and a replacement for the American “welfare state.” (Gingrich, 1995) Gingrich appropriates Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* as his primary source to identify what he labels the “collection of values, principles, habits and institutions (which) could be grouped together as ‘American Civilization’”. Yet, among those defining values, he mentions only “free enterprise in a free market, entrepreneurship, productivity, incentives and the work ethic, citizenship, the rule of law, the right to free speech and free elections.” Tocqueville’s seminal comments on associations in America and the role of voluntary association as intermediate between the individual and state are not mentioned.

In fact, in the Gingrich *Futurist* article, there is but a single, incidental reference to third sector institutions of any type. He

notes that “such a transformation (that is, a balanced budget together with a redefinition of government) would require a deep shift in popular thinking about the role of the federal government compared with the roles of the citizen, voluntary associations (including religious institutions), private business, and local and state government.” Given the important roles which voluntary associations, including religious institutions, have played in American public life during the past century, and the kind of absence of any mention in Gingrich’s (and other new *laissez faire*) works, one can only ask whether such a redefinition involves simply writing voluntary organization out of the public equation altogether.

The answer, paradoxical as it may seem, appears to be “yes.” One of the things that make the new *laissez-faire* of Gingrich and others especially interesting is its paradoxical – even self-denying – connection to the claim that a new “Third Wave” civilization is emerging. In the immediate past issue of *The Futurist*, for example, Alvin and Heidi Toffler write “we are living through the birth pangs of a new civilization whose institutions are not yet in place. A fundamental skill needed by policy-makers, politicians and politically active citizens today – if they really want to know what they are doing – is, therefore, the ability to distinguish between proposals designed to keep the tottering Second Wave system on life-support from those that ease the growth of the next, Third Wave, civilization.” (Toffler and Toffler, 1995)

One might concede their claims that a new “Third Wave” civilization is emerging to replace the old industrial order and that it is advisable that barriers to the new civilization be removed, rather than, for example, asking the new order to test its mettle by overcoming those barriers. In making such concessions, however, it seems fair to ask, whether the kind of *laissez-faire*, atomistic individualism, which sees life as, consisting only of home, work and school is not, itself, one of those barriers?

### **World Future Society**

At a previous conference, for example, John Vasconcellos, a California state assemblyman and keynote speaker at the conference said, “All U.S. institutions are ‘in terrible dysfunction.’ (Note the word “all.”) In clarifying his point, Vasconcellos said,

“These include families, schools, the health-care and criminal justice systems, and governments.” Three conclusions seem plausible: The author, an elected public official in a large urban state, is unaware of third sector. Third sector institutions are so inconsequential they are not worthy of mention. Or, third sector institutions are not among those in terrible dysfunction, and therefore, presumably worth looking at as part of any plausible solution.

William E. Halal, professor of management at George Washington Univ., echoed a familiar “third wave” theme in his claim that we are witnessing “the collapse of the Industrial Age model of institutions” which posit that centrally planned bureaucracies can be trusted to solve our problems.” In a classical new *laissez faire* leap, “What’s needed, said Halal, is for institutions to put the ideals of democratic free enterprise into practice. For example, some corporations are establishing internal markets, and parents, teachers, and local citizens in Chicago are elected to run their own schools.”

The message here is clear: private action *is* market action. This central message of the new *laissez faire* effectively defines the third sector out of existence. All voluntary behavior other than profit seeing and consumption is irrational and inefficient, *all* donative and philanthropic behavior is suspect.

### **“The Future of Michigan”**

The new *laissez-faire* is not only operative in national political rhetoric. One also finds that it has a strong influence upon economic development discussions – particularly as those discussions focus on the future of electronic technology.

In April of this year, I presented a paper at a conference on the application of information technology to nonprofits at Michigan State University. The keynote speaker who kicked off the conference was a futurist and executive director of a nonprofit organization called Michigan Futures, Inc. He presented a detailed and elegant vision of the future impact of computers in the homes, communities and companies of what is still one of the nation’s largest industrial states.



I was more interested, however, in what he didn't say than what he did. Keep in mind, he was presenting to a conference on computers and nonprofit organizations, attended by approximately 200 staff, board members and volunteers associated with local, regional and statewide nonprofit organizations in Michigan. Yet, the speech contained nothing about the future impact of computers on churches, synagogues, mosques, human service agencies, membership associations, civic clubs, private colleges or any other known or recognizable nonprofit organizations, voluntary associations or philanthropic activities. He didn't mention *any* potential implications for civic friendship or citizenship. He didn't refer to the revolutionary impact computer data bases are already having on fund-raising, or the potential they have for community organizing. His references to the information superhighway (a.k.a., the National Information Infrastructure) made no mention of the attempts by the Network for Civic Computing and others to generate discussion of the future role for an electronic commons.

The conclusion seems unmistakable: In the view of this informed futurist, there is no future worth commenting on when it comes to the commons.

Please do not misunderstand me: It was an excellent speech, well written and well delivered. Indeed, it is in part because of the author's command of his subject and his rhetorical accomplishment that the omissions were so glaring. For what suddenly struck me was the degree to which the speaker was presenting the conventional wisdom of American public life today. I think that conventional wisdom about the future – which I have already referred to as the new *laissez faire* – consists of two important premises:

1. Communities consist of three domains: home, school and work.
  - a. Work is where people engage in one of the two central events of life. (Production)

b. Home is the place of respite from productive work (leisure) and the center for the other essential life activity (consumption).

c. School is what young people do to prepare for work. (No preparation for shopping is deemed essential.)

2. Liberating private initiative from the shackles of public oppression is the major

I'm not suggesting that people in general have such a narrow, constricted view of life. I'm saying that in so far as public officials, business and community leaders today are able to apply a widely shared "consensus" public ideology to public issues this seems to be the vision of community it contains. This isn't the vision of the future you will hear, of course, at Memorial Day or 4th of July speeches, in sermons, political party caucuses or at the annual meetings of community organizations should you be one of the dwindling minority of people still in attendance. It is, however, the vision you will see peeking through public discussions of all sorts when people are about other tasks – such as discussing the role of government or further applications of computer technology.

### **"Blue Print for a 21st Century Community"**

One of the singularly telling documents on the late 20th century estimation of the impact of information technology on the development of society is the report *Blue Print for a 21st Century Community. The Phase II Report* issued by an economic development task force called Joint Venture: Silicon Valley in June 1993. The report is available on the Internet, and prints out at 57 pages of 12 pt. Palatino (the same size as the type on this page).

Based on the title, (an impression supported by the introduction) you would anticipate that this was to be a comprehensive planning study of the future of the region in its political, social and economic multiplicity. You would anticipate also that – given the title – community would figure prominently in the presentation.

Because of the uniquely innovative role of the valley in the development of the information society, it offers in several respects a bellwether image of the future. As the report itself says “No other region in the world can yet match the combination of our strong entrepreneurial culture, diverse pool of knowledge workers, or breadth of leading-edge companies.”

The report itself was the product of a task force consisting of “more than 1,000 business, government and community leaders in Silicon Valley.” The organization of Silicon Valley, as a 21st century community if one is to believe the detailed discussions of the report, will consist only of business, local government, education and health care.

The most remarkable finding of this report is that the third sector is completely missing from the vision of the future put forth by this group. Education is primarily a local government function, and contemporary health care is a major industry. There is some inchoate desire within the report, yearning to break free and provide more fulsome recognition of the real complexity of community life. It is reflected in subheadings like “The Danger: Companies Win, Community Loses”. But it never breaks free into any actual discussion.

Future industry in the valley is seen as divided into seven export-oriented clusters. Four of these – semiconductors, computer/communications, defense/space and business services – have been the traditional core of the region. Three others – software, bioscience and environment – are seen as future emergents.

In a section entitled “Creating the 21st Century Community, we find echoes of the Toffler, *Future Shock* rhetoric: “Creating ... a 21st Century Community will require that people, companies, and organizations work together in new, collaborative ways.” No details are provided, however, on what such collaborations may consist of or how they may be organized.

Yet, in what sounds like a curiously second wave rendering, “community infrastructure” is defined on a subsequent page as “highly skilled people, advanced telecommunications capacity, information networks, and other resources” which are “(as) quality oriented in terms of customer satisfaction, cycle time reduction, and flexibility as the companies it (sic) supports.” This

leads to the admonition that “Only a community in which firms, institutions, and individuals collaborate easily and effectively can produce such an infrastructure.”

Communities also have an important public relations value: “To maintain a high standard of living in a relatively high cost area, Silicon Valley should have a reputation as a region whose infrastructure helps companies generate a relatively higher levels of value. Firms looking for adaptable and responsive community partners that help provide the foundation for high-value-added work-including high-skilled workers, fast and efficient regulatory processes, tax systems that encourages business investment, and a telecommunications infrastructure that is second to none.”

Approaching the issue of taxes in the post-modern world can be tricky: “The fundamental problem is that Silicon Valley (as a community?) is not capturing enough of the value that the region’s companies are generating. Dramatic changes in corporate organization and practices have led to dramatically higher output per employee in area firms. Even as Silicon Valley reels from recession, individual companies are doing better than ever. Earnings and productivity are skyrocketing.”

“A culture of conflict and blame has hurt the ability of the public and private sectors to work together to solve major problems. The inability to organize regional assets and build a ‘collaborative advantage’ through strong working relationships is a major reason that Silicon Valley has not reached its full potential.”

“As employers and neighbors and parents we are, moreover, confronted with the reality that key segments of our population – young people, the lower-skilled – struggle to participate in the quality of life of our region. Brain drain, a growing disenfranchised population, and increasingly difficulty recruiting new employees to the area have become serious economic and social issues.”

“The success of a high-performance community must be measured by increases in the standard of living (real wages and real per capita income), not simply by job creation or population growth.”

“Silicon Valley will be both technology drive and relationship driven. Traditionally, Silicon Valley has been primarily technology driven...Silicon Valley must now be more market-driven and technology must be rapidly commercialized through a series of dynamic supplier-customer relationships. In the 21st Century, Silicon Valley will be the most adept region in the world in forging relationships necessary for rapid technological innovation and use.”

“Silicon Valley will enjoy strong connections between its global companies and its local communities.... Many global firms...are learning to develop strong relationships in each of the regions where they operate.”

One of the Joint Venture initiatives was the “Smart Valley” initiative which “provides a vision of an ‘electronic community’ that brings the full power of information technologies to fundamentally change the way industry, government and education work together to create advantage through collaboration. The electronic network linking companies, universities, government agencies, and individuals enables the Valley to achieve a higher level of productivity and greatly expanded options for both people and firms in applications ranging from electronic commerce and distance learning to health care information.”

“The 21st Century Workforce initiative acts as a catalyst to connect schools, businesses, and homes into a new learning system that transcends traditional boundaries.”

“The cost of doing business in the Valley is reduced through the effective use of information technologies and closer relationships between business and government. An electronic regulatory clearinghouse reduces paperwork burdens while wide dissemination of local performance standards in the permitting process cuts down on cycle-time delay. The Silicon Valley Economic Development Team operates ‘smart teams’ to help identify and reduce barriers to business expansion and retention.”

“Community partners work toward a common set of goals for higher real incomes, increasing quality of life, and expanding opportunities. Information technologies invented in the Valley are now employed to help make this happen. New relationships

sustained by information networks enable new levels of cooperation in addressing education, regulatory, technology and enterprise challenges.” Among the “key needs” identified by the report at later points are “an industry ‘voice’ at the regional, state and federal levels”; a “pro-manufacturing tax structure”; application of ‘computers/communication technologies to community problems’ and an ‘industry voice to advocate for comprehensive tax reform’.

### **The Third Sector Paradox**

Despite its apparently complete blindness to the third sector, “To begin phase III implementation, the Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network has been incorporated as a new nonprofit organization to sustain the work of specific initiatives and continue to forge linkages between new and existing community activities.” At a later point in the report, we learn that “Smart Valley, Inc. is a 501 (c) (6) nonprofit organization governed by an eight-member board of directors and affiliated with Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network.”

The Smart Valley vision of community is somewhat more expansive: It includes “technology providers, service providers, applications developers and end users.”

Indirect support for my conclusion that the composition of groups and the identification of issues accurately reflects the interests of participants is provided by the following description of the ways in which the original task structure was expanded: “The prevalence of telecommunications and networking concerns among Working Groups led to the creation of a ‘Smart Valley’ information infrastructure group. Concern about the cost of and access to health care launched a Health Care Task Force. Joint Venture also created a Diversity Task Force to ensure more broad-based participation in Industry and Infrastructure Working Groups.” Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that if there were any genuine sentiment among participants for a more expanded vision of community, it probably would have resulted in the addition of other specialized subcommittees directed toward that end.

“The Bay Area is the ideal location to begin the implementation of the National Information Infrastructure.”

“The JVSJ process helped create or support four specific pilot projects.” An electronic training network for those already in the labor force; school-to-work transition for “those about to enter the work force from high school;” (drop outs?) a regional educational clearinghouse for sharing best practices for K-12; and a Better Learning Through Technology initiative to improve the use of technology in education.

An “initiative to reduce the cost of doing business” in the Valley by promoting “an efficient, consistent, and reasonable regulatory environment while maintaining high safety standards.” It has three principle foci: regulatory forum, council on tax and fiscal policy and health care task force.

There is nothing at all unusual about this group. In fact, I picked it because it is probably typical of the mainline community and economic development interests in the U.S. today. JVSJ Network board list includes 25 members: Twelve appear to represent (mostly small) commercial interests. Four members are identifiably with local government, and two are state representatives. Two are representatives of higher education and one is a local school representative. Others represent Labor Council, Chamber of Commerce, Sierra Club, Economic and Social Opportunities, Inc., Asian Americans for Community Development.

## **National Information Infrastructure**

It may not simply be the forms of nonprofit, voluntary and philanthropic organization that are vetoed by the new *laissez faire*. Also suspect are various forms of common goods. This is clearly illustrated by the way in which the existing “fair use” doctrine has become a target of proposals to modify the existing copyright law in the U.S.

A recent analysis in the Chronicle of Higher Education concluded that “(i)f the publishing and software industries have their way with the revision of the U.S. Copyright Act, any copying in the realm of electronic information that is not authorized by the copyright owner will be illegal.

“While nearly everyone agrees that copyrights need to be protected from infringement on the emerging information

superhighway (formally known as the National Information Infrastructure) most people are not aware that publishers and software producers are seeking an absolute monopoly on the right to digitize, store, and transmit copyrighted information. Once in complete control of the rights to electronic information, they intend to offer licenses and contracts that will define the extent to which information users may (or may not) read, browse, print, copy, share, lend or retransmit copyrighted works. (Frazier, 1995)

"The legal framework for this seemingly paranoid vision of the future is clearly outlined in the "Preliminary Report of the Working Group on Intellectual Property," released in July, 1994 which was produced by the Information Infrastructure Task Force of the U. S. Department of Commerce...Representatives of the Clinton Administration have said that the preliminary report is on the right track.

"(The) report proposes that the copyright holder be given the exclusive right to 'transmit' a copyrighted work.

"The report also recommends eliminating the 'doctrine of first sale' for electronic information. In the world of paper publications, the doctrine affirms the commonsense notion that, once bought, a book can be resold, lent, rented or given away without the permission of the copyright holder.

Finally, so that no one tampers with the security systems of this brave new information infrastructure, the report proposes that existing copyright laws be revised to prohibit devices, products and services that 'defeat technological methods of preventing unauthorized use."

### **If It Ain't Broke, Break It**

This approach would, of course, effectively nullify "fair use" doctrines that currently allow certain forms of copying for educational and public interest reasons. It would also effectively eliminate knowledge dissemination and public discourse as common goods in favor of a laissez faire vision of the unconditional property rights of the authors and publishers. As an example, all of the quotations in this presentation are done within the terms of scholarly fair use. Obtaining explicit permission from each of the copyright holders in question would have been an onerous but necessary task.



There is a maximum irony in this, in that the Internet was originally created out of what is one of the few genuine, global public interests – survival of nuclear holocaust. It's most successful features – newsgroups, email list servers, MOO's, bulletin boards, and most spectacularly, the World Wide Web – all have the character of commons, rather than markets. That is, voluntary participation, shared purposes and resources, a strong sense of mutuality characterize them. While commercial, profit-making access services (such as Compuserve, AmericaOnLine and Prodigy) appear to be thriving, to date commercial visions of what Nicholas von Hoffman calls “electrotainment” have been notably unsuccessful. (von Hoffman, 1995)

I am not holding this proposal up as a shibboleth: There is little doubt that such proposals, if passed into law, would prove as unworkable as 35 mph speed limits on interstate highways, and would ultimately prove unconstitutional under any sane interpretation of the First Amendment. I hold them up here primarily as additional examples of new *laissez faire* policy proposals and their tendency to dismiss any aspect of cooperative, shared, voluntary, collaborative endeavors.

## **Communitarianism**

The resurgence of individualist and entrepreneurial rhetoric in American public life that I am calling the New Laissez Faire has proven to be very strong medicine in our era.

The *laissez faire* influence has been so strong, in fact, that even communitarians have proven, somewhat paradoxically, susceptible to its influence, and in particular to its vision of community as home, work and school. Evidence for this conclusion can be found, for example, in the article by a leading communitarian spokesman, the sociologist Amatai Etzioni, in the November-December, 1993 issue of *The Futurist*.

In that article, Etzioni sounds a major communitarian theme which has also been taken up by advocates of the new *laissez faire* : "Historians will look back on the 1990's, I believe, and see them as a period in which the reconstruction of American society took place..."

Etzioni's preferred reconstruction, however, is quite distinct from the new *laissez faire* emphasis on diminishing central government taxation and regulation: "From a preoccupation with rights, American society is moving to demand that people shoulder their responsibilities and pay greater attention to the needs of their families and communities." Yet, in a curious concession to the *laissez faire* view, all of his examples of resurgent "community" involve the *laissez faire* formula of either families or schools.

It would be easy to suggest that this is merely a temporary oversight. However, in a keynote speech to the International Society for Third Sector Research in Pecs, Hungary last summer, the absence of all but the most cursory references to third sector organizations or commons was as evident in Etzioni's as in the speech by Glazer noted above. Moreover, examination of the platform of the communitarian party and Etzioni's communitarian manifesto will reveal much the same gaps.

I am currently reviewing the writings of communitarians, and can note that with a few major exceptions, the vision of community espoused by communitarians is largely lacking in any attention to nonprofit organizations, voluntary action or philanthropy. Explicit references to nonprofit organizations, voluntary action and philanthropy are conspicuous mostly by their absence from most communitarian writings.

This trend is paradoxical in at least two distinct ways: First, even though they may not be recognized, many forms of association will continue. Secondly, the very absence of recognition is contributing to dangerous new expressions of organized alienation, like the militia movement. Thirdly, the growth of *laissez faire* in this country is preventing Americans from seeing one major aspect of the emerging new world order: a "global associational revolution" in which traditional American values regarding the political, civil and social importance of voluntary association and nonprofit organization are being disseminated throughout the world.

In the age of the new *laissez faire*, proposals like Harlan Cleveland's call in the Futurist for a global commons to supervise 'the common heritage of mankind' go largely unheeded. (Cleveland, 1993)

"Havel himself mentions the need 'to invent new organizational structures appropriate to the present multicultural age....

"We can also do far more to encourage a healthy development of the social sciences, which have given occasional demonstrations of their power to help us understand more clearly our psychological and institutional failings. Up to now, the social sciences have been poorly supported and often corrupted by ideologies and special interests, but that could change in the future. A reformed social science might show us how to overcome many of the obstacles to cultural understanding and global peace."

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